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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2003 annual meeting, "Research to Policy," June 12-14, 2003

**NOT ALL AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS GOOD FOR LATCHKEY KIDS
SOME MAY OFFER LITTLE OR NO BENEFIT IN REDUCING DELINQUENCY AND DRUG USE**

- Is enrolling in an after-school program a guarantee that at-risk youth may not engage in delinquent behavior or drug use?
- What makes one after-school program better than another?
- Do after-school programs benefit elementary school kids as well as older kids?

All across the country, after-school programs are increasing in number and popularity, because it is widely known that arrests for juvenile crime peak between 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. on school days. Previous research has shown that hanging out with peers without adult supervision during the after-school hours increases the risk of delinquency and drug use. But just because at-risk youth are enrolled in an after-school program does not mean they are out of trouble.

A study being presented at the Society for Prevention Research annual meeting indicates that after-school programs can help youth to reduce their levels of delinquency and drug use, particularly for middle-school aged youths. But not all after-school programs are the same. Programs that provided structured social skills training showed the greatest effects on reducing delinquency, substance use, and intentions to use drugs. Programs with more efficient procedures, more effective behavior management systems, and greater structure also produced better youth outcomes. Middle school youths attending programs emphasizing recreation, however, did not lead to reductions in delinquent behavior.

Prevention researchers are also trying to answer the question of whether after-school programs effectively target the youth who could potentially receive the greatest benefit. The research indicates that after-school programs may attract youths who are not particularly prone to engage in problem behavior, and that the most delinquency-prone youths tend to drop out of the programs. The research suggests that programs may have to make special efforts to reach higher risk populations if they are to reduce delinquent behavior.

Sources: Denise Gottfredson, Ph.D., Stephanie Weisman, Ph.D., Shannon Womer, M.A. & David Soulé, M.A., all from University of Maryland College Park.

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